Cathedral had meant so much to her father, she turned to look back at it.

"The Duomo," he had said, "is the most magnificent Gothic building in northern Italy." It was certainly spectacular, Luella thought, with its high dome and four towers. The *façade*, which her father had told her was not completed until 1813, was different from and certainly more impressive than that of any other cathedral she had seen.

She tipped back her head to look up at it. It was then a voice beside her said: "I see you are admiring our beautiful Cathedral, Signorina. As I expect you know, those who built it so high believed that the higher they went, the nearer they got to God."

Luella had started when the man had first spoken to her and thought quickly she should move away. As he finished speaking she turned to look at him. He was, she saw, a middle-aged man with greying hair under his hat, and smartly dressed. Before she could reply he said: "I feel sure you are English, and we always consider it a compliment if the English admire our churches and buildings when they have so many beautiful examples in their own country."

"The Cathedral certainly is very fine!" Luella agreed.

She knew she should move away and had already started to walk the first few steps when the stranger said: "Forgive me if I sound impertinent, Signorina, but, surely you are not alone?"

Because he sounded so shocked by the idea, Luella answered: "I . . I am afraid I am, but my hotel is just around the corner."



"Then perhaps you will allow me to escort you there," the stranger said. "Anyone as beautiful as you is bound to attract attention from impudent and undesirable young men who have nothing better to do."

He spoke English very fluently, despite an Italian accent, and Luella gave a little laugh. "If I walk quickly," she said, "I doubt if anybody will attempt to accost me."

"Nevertheless, Signorina, I feel it my duty to see you are safe," the stranger persisted.

Looking round, Luella was aware that he had some reason for what he was saying. There were several young Italians sitting on the steps up to the Cathedral, watching her as if she was some form of entertainment.

"I am, in fact," she said, "going now to the British Embassy, which I believe is not far from here."

"Then you are going back to England?" the stranger enquired.

"It is . . something I have to do," Luella said. "You see . . my father . . has . . d.died." She could not help her voice breaking on the last words.

The man beside her gave a little murmur of sympathy. "So you are all alone," he remarked. "A terrible predicament for a beautiful young Englishwoman in a strange country."

"I . . I shall be . . all right," Luella said, "and thank you for being so consolatory."

She would have walked away, but he moved beside her. "As you so rightly said, your Embassy is only two streets away," he said, "but it seems a pity that